

Downtown Salisbury

Salisbury's downtown area is the pride of the community. During the visioning meetings held for this plan, citizens identified the downtown as the area most responsible for giving Salisbury its character as a community. Yet, the continued vitality of the downtown has not been without its challenges over the years. During the past few decades, the downtown area has survived the departure of many of its most significant office and retail anchors. It has endured the slip covering and uncovering of many of its most beautiful building facades. It has seen businesses come and go, succeed and fail. Yet, through it all, downtown Salisbury has demonstrated its economic resiliency.

Background on Downtown Revitalization Efforts

Compared to most cities of its size in North Carolina, Salisbury has a lengthy history of active involvement in downtown revitalization. The following chronology summarizes some of the most significant events concerning downtown revitalization and historic preservation in Salisbury:

1975: Salisbury's downtown and several surrounding residential neighborhoods received designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

1980: Salisbury was chosen as one of the five original "Main Street Cities" in North Carolina. This program, conducted under the auspices of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is designed to equip small cities for the on-going task of preservation, redevelopment and revitalization of their downtowns.

Early 1980's: The downtown area municipal service district was established, providing a mechanism for generating tax revenues for downtown area improvements. The municipal service district contains roughly 24 blocks, stretching from Jackson Street to Long Street and from Horah Street to Cemetery Street.

Early 1980's: Downtown Area Facade Incentive Grants Program was initiated, providing matching grants to property owners who improve their building facades.

1984: A Master Plan for the Downtown identified 22 strategies for improving downtown Salisbury, including the establishment of a non-profit organization to spearhead downtown revitalization efforts. (Downtown Salisbury Inc. was established.)

1987-88: The renovation of the Salisbury Post marked a major turning point in the revitalization of the downtown.

1988: Three major projects were identified as central to the successful revitalization of downtown Salisbury: the old post office, the Salisbury Depot and the Grubb-Wallace Building (the Plaza). All three projects were successfully undertaken and completed during the 1990's.

1996: Meroney Theatre renovation was completed.

In recent years, investment in downtown Salisbury has been a model of public-private sector cooperation. The City has been consistently



proactive in leveraging public sector dollars to trigger private sector investment. Examples have included Klutz Drug Store, Rendall Travel Marketing and the Hedrick Block.

Currently, a new master plan for the downtown area is nearing completion. Many of the issues and policy statements set forth in this section, therefore, draw upon the strategies contained in the new downtown master plan.

Policies for Downtown Salisbury

Policy D-1: The City shall encourage a compatible, diverse mixture of retail, office, institutional, residential, dining, services, entertainment, and public open space in the downtown area.



Unlike the homogenous, single purpose districts found in suburban areas, Salisbury's downtown derives its economic energy from a tremendous diversity of uses found in the area. This interdependent mix of businesses and activities thrives and supports itself with amazing durability. Downtown activities include retail sales, services, dining, entertainment, residential, government, religious, education, finance, recreation, and public open spaces.

It is important for the economic health of the area that the downtown not be given over to one use more than another. For example, if the downtown were to become too heavily dominated by offices, nightlife and natural pedestrian security of the area would diminish. Similarly, without the restaurants in the downtown area, downtown office workers would suffer the same plight as their suburban counterparts, joining the noontime rush-hour traffic in search of a restaurant. The downtown is also a logical area for residential development, close to city services, bus lines, rail service, entertainment, etc.

(Please also see the chapter on Parks, Open Space, and Greenways for a discussion of the need for additional public open space, including play space, as the number of residential units in the downtown increases.)

Policy D-2: While encouraging a diversity of uses and activities in the downtown area, the City recognizes the advantages of clustering similar activities in specific parts of the downtown.

The recently prepared Master Plan for downtown Salisbury gives considerable attention to the concept of clustering similar activities together so as to create added interest and convenience for visitors to Salisbury. The Master Plan suggests that, for example, retail businesses should be located primarily along Main and Innes Streets. This clustering will increase the retail strength of each individual business by making it easier for customers to visit more than one retail establishment at a time.

Another example includes the clustering of cultural and visitor's facilities, both existing and potential, in what the report refers to as downtown Salisbury's "East Square Arts and Cultural District". The report states:

Imagine the appeal of Salisbury's vibrant, historic downtown if the Water Works Gallery, the Rowan Museum, the Depot, the National Sports Writers and Sportscasters Association Hall of

Fame, the Visitors Center, a farmers market, the Fisher Street festival zone, the Easy Street Arts Walk and the Spencer trolley were all located within a 2 block radius of one another. Within four blocks would be the Meroney Theatre, the Ice House/Confederate Prison Interpretive Center, the Rowan Library, the Empire Hotel, the Salisbury Emporium, historic house museums and all of historic Main Street. With...the opportunity to redevelop old warehouses as artists lofts and studios, there is a very strong potential for establishing the "East Square Arts and Cultural District" as one of downtown Salisbury's premier attractions. (from Seven Strategies for Downtown Salisbury, 2000)

Policy D-3: Pedestrian oriented streetscape improvements including, but not limited to, sidewalks, street trees, street lights, street furniture, and landscaping shall be employed consistent with the historic, pedestrian character of the downtown and to stimulate continued economic development.

Over the past two decades, the City of Salisbury has been active in installing new crosswalks, street trees, streetlights, benches, trash receptacles, etc. to enhance the appearance and livability of downtown Salisbury. Several blocks of the downtown have become a showcase, not only during special events or when the trees are decorated during the holiday season, but year-round, as downtown workers and visitors enjoy the walkable comfort of the area.

Examples include the East Innes Demonstration Project from the railroad bridge to the Square (completed in 1986) and the replacement of all street trees on Main Street (completed in 1987). Since that time, streetscape improvements have continued in several areas of the downtown. In the past year, improvements have been undertaken for the first three blocks of East Council Street. Most recently, an "underground utilities zone" has been proposed as a recommendation of the new Downtown Master Plan.

Regardless of the level of investment placed in streetscape improvements, it will be important that downtown area streets be properly maintained and kept clean. Maintenance and cleanliness are presumed as a critical element in the City's efforts to promote the area as a tourist destination focusing on historic preservation.

These improvements should therefore be continued, as budgets allow, to all sections of the downtown where buildings pull up to the street and a pedestrian oriented environment is clearly intended.

Policy D-4: As the primary entryway corridor into downtown Salisbury, Innes Street shall continue to receive priority for visual enhancements, employing special development standards, public investment, and community involvement to facilitate constructive change.

The importance of the Innes Street entryway to the downtown area and, indeed, the entire city of Salisbury is covered elsewhere in this plan in the **Newer, Existing Commercial Areas** section. Whereas at one time Innes Street was an attractive tree-lined residential corridor and a suitable



entryway into the heart of the city, today it serves to diminish first impressions of the community. A visitor to Salisbury exiting onto Innes Street from Interstate 85 is immediately confronted with a morass of asphalt, overhead utilities, fast food and chain store signage, and very little greenery. It is this initial impression that establishes an unfortunate and inaccurate image of the rest of the community.

Fortunately, several initiatives are underway which will, over time, correct these problems. A newly designed Interstate 85 interchange will add landscaping and other aesthetic improvements at the Innes Street overpass. A visual corridor overlay district (VCOD), once adopted into the City's zoning ordinance, will require that future development and redevelopment along this corridor conform to improved standards for site design and landscaping.

The Innes Street Improvement Grants Program was started in 1996, as a result of the recommendations of an Urban Design Assistance Team (UDAT). The Improvement Program has resulted in 23 grants in five years including for example, facade restoration of 210 and 212 East Innes Street, Mad. Avenue Advertising, Cathey Buggy Works, and landscape improvements to the Ketner Center Parking Lot on West Innes Street. The City's improvement grants program will continue to offer financial incentives for business and property owners to upgrade building facades, parking lots and landscaping within this corridor.

Policy D-5: The City shall encourage efforts to direct new and expanding businesses requiring office space to compatible spaces in the downtown area.



Downtown Salisbury has a significant concentration of office space, and has been labeled by some as “the largest office/business park in Rowan County”. Office workers are critical to the economic foundation of the downtown area, in that they create much needed demand for products, services and dining establishments. Future economic development efforts should therefore seek to direct new and expanding businesses requiring office space first to the downtown, and secondarily to other non center-city locations. Implementation of this policy may require that the City, working closely with Downtown Salisbury, Inc. and the Rowan County Chamber of Commerce, inventory and actively market available space in the downtown for office use.

Policy D-6: The City shall maintain a tangible presence and commitment to the downtown through the location of the City's major municipal offices there. The City shall also encourage other local, state and federal governments to maintain similar commitments to the downtown.

It is unfortunate that, in some communities, the same factors that have caused private sector businesses to depart the downtown have had a similar effect on the relocation of some government offices. During the past two decades, in particular, some government offices have relocated to suburban locations to gain space for parking, to provide for handicapped access, to obtain better heating ventilation and cooling systems, or for other factors. Fortunately, the exodus of government offices from some downtowns has not been a significant problem in Salisbury.

When the United States Post Office, for example, vacated its former building at the corner of West Innes and Church Street in 1987, Rowan County stepped in to fill the void, completing an exemplary renovation of the old post office. In addition to providing a much-needed meeting room for the Rowan County Commissioners, the former post office is now being used for county administrative offices.

The Social Security Administration moved out of the downtown in 2000. This federal agency, previously located in the 100 block of East Council Street, moved to newer quarters on the other side of Interstate 85. While no new occupant has yet been identified to fill this now empty space, it is hoped that when the building is again put to use, it will be reconfigured to have an entrance located on the Council Street frontage.

Beyond government offices replacing other government offices, there have occasionally been situations where government offices have replaced former private sector offices. For example, the City recently completed a major renovation of the former Security Bank building in the 200 block of South Main Street. With renovation work completed in 1999, the building now houses the City Council chambers as well as the Mayor's office and other City administrative offices.

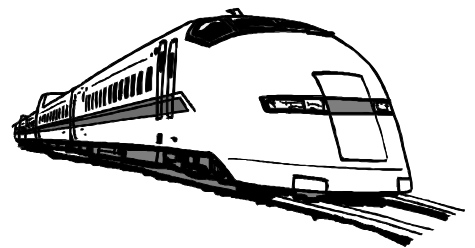
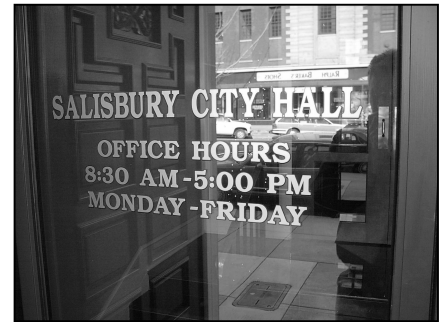
Another example of local government commitment to the downtown, previously mentioned under Policy I-1 of this plan, involves the adaptive reuse of the Ruffy Building, located at the corner of North Main and Liberty streets. The former plumbing supply warehouse was gutted and refurbished, and has been used since 1995 as the home of the Rowan County Justice Center. Finally, Downtown Salisbury Inc. was pleased to announce in 1999 the relocation of the offices of the State Division of Community Assistance, of the NC Department of Commerce, to office space in the City-owned Plaza Building at the corner of Main and Innes.

The importance of each of these individual commitments to maintaining local and state government office space in the downtown area cannot be overstated. Each downtown area office worker plays an important role in sustaining retail and dining establishments in the downtown area.

Policy D-7: The City shall continue to explore the development implications and potentials concerning new and expanded passenger rail service between Salisbury and Charlotte, Raleigh, Asheville, and elsewhere.

The prospect of new and expanded rail service for passengers in and out of Salisbury opens up a number of economic development possibilities for the downtown and indeed, the entire community.

One scenario, for example, illustrates the magnitude of the potential economic benefit. Consider Salisbury as a major conference destination for professional development workshops. Such workshops could occur in a "living laboratory" on a variety of subjects for which Salisbury is becoming increasingly known: historic preservation, community involvement, downtown revitalization, housing rehabilitation, community based policing, parks, recreation and greenway development, urban forestry and a rich history of entrepreneurship (Food Lion, Cheerwine, Stanback, etc.)



New and expanded rail access directly into downtown Salisbury offers the possibility of bringing in conference attendees (and others) free of the automobile. Such persons would spend money on accommodations, meeting facilities, meals, shopping, and entertainment while placing no additional burden on downtown area parking facilities. They would also represent a “captive market” for the downtown in that their spending would be limited largely to the area in which they could walk.

In addition to conference attendance, improved rail service offers the promise of day trips and weekend excursions to Salisbury by train, to combine a rail travel experience with visits to historic Salisbury, the Spencer Shops (Transportation Museum), the National Cemetery, and its many attractions.

Finally, the advent of expanded passenger service opens up the possibility of home to work commuting patterns in and out of Salisbury to jobs and homes in other parts of the region. Salisbury residents commuting to jobs in Charlotte or Greensboro would be a real possibility. Similarly, residents of these larger cities commuting to jobs, or conducting business in downtown Salisbury is not out of the question.

In general, improved passenger rail service into downtown Salisbury has the potential in the 21st Century to create a renewal of development interests first witnessed in the 19th century- that of intensified development near the train station. Offices and residential units within a convenient walk or transit ride to the train station could allow for the easy movement of people in and out of Salisbury. Retail development, in turn, would be boosted by the available dollars to be spent by larger numbers of downtown area workers and residents.



Policy D-8: The City shall encourage the development of a full-service fresh market in a permanent location downtown.

Downtown Salisbury Inc. is currently pursuing the development of a farmers market on a site in the 300 block of East Council Street. This initiative should be pursued for several reasons. First downtown area residents are in near universal agreement that the area is much in need of a full-service grocery store. Despite this need, the private sector has not yet stepped forward to invest in such a store. A fully developed farmers market, including a broad range of produce, meats, dairy products, fish, poultry, etc. would go a long way toward meeting every day food needs. These basic needs could then be supplemented by less frequent major shopping excursions to outlying supermarkets for nonperishable canned goods, paper products, etc. Second, daytime office and retail workers represent a substantial buying population. A fresh market downtown would afford these workers the opportunity to meet some portion of their fresh product grocery needs before their journey home.

Third, some City fresh markets have been shown to be significant tourism attractions. Roanoke, Virginia, for example, has been quite successful in establishing a well known farmer's market, complemented by downtown area restaurants and museums. Lexington Market in Baltimore, and Pike's Place Market in Seattle, among the most well known of the nation's fresh markets, draw crowds of tourists from all over the U.S. In these cases, eating concessions and a limited range of nonperishable items for sale conveniently complement the sale of fresh

products. While an attraction of the scale of Lexington or Pikes Place is clearly not anticipated for Salisbury, the fundamental principle remains the same: tourists can provide an important economic supplement to the mainstay purchases of permanent residents.

Policy D-9: Design standards shall be employed to ensure that development and redevelopment will be supportive of the architectural and historic context that is vital to the economic success of downtown Salisbury.

It is interesting that while the residential neighborhoods surrounding much of the downtown are protected by design standards associated with locally designated historic districts, no such similar protections are in place for the historic central business district of Salisbury. Under North Carolina's general planning enabling legislation, local governments like the City of Salisbury may not regulate the design appearance of structures and sites unless such structure or site is in a locally designated historic district or an approved redevelopment area. (Redevelopment area designation usually requires that an area be in poor and declining condition.) Thus, Salisbury has, over the years, designated local historic districts for West Square, North Main Street, Ellis Street Graded School, and Brooklyn/South Square but has yet to designate a local historic district covering the traditional downtown business district.

The City's Historic Preservation Commission has the authority to issue "certificates of appropriateness" for alterations, additions, demolitions, and new construction in these areas. The idea is to ensure that any exterior alteration will be in keeping with the historic architectural character of the individual building. In the case of new construction, HPC reviews the new building's design, and, while not trying to recreate the historic buildings which currently exist in the area, looks for compatibility with the size, scale, proportion, and architectural styles of the district. The "Gateway" building at the corner of North Lee and East Innes Streets, while not subject to HPC review, is a good example of such a "contemporary compatible" design. The design of this new building, which will house the Chamber of Commerce and other offices, was accomplished with good sensitivity to the character of the surrounding area.



Concern remains that not all prospective developers will be (or have been) as sensitive to architectural and historic context of the downtown area as were the developers of the Gateway. Without consistent architectural standards and review procedures, it is conceivable that an entirely inappropriate new structure could be "dropped" into the midst of the downtown business district, destroying the historic integrity of the area and its economic value as a cultural and historic center and tourism draw. This is exactly what happened several years ago, for example, in Matthews, North Carolina, when a self-service gasoline station with a huge, bright plastic overhead canopy was placed at the main intersection of the community's historic town center.

In addition, designation as a local historic district brings protection from the indiscriminant demolition of historic structures and the prevention of "demolition by neglect". In the latter case, for example, absentee owners of structures in the local historic district would be prevented from allowing their buildings to decline due to obvious neglect. When a building owner is found to be neglecting their structure beyond the reasonable standards

set forth in the ordinance, an order may be issued requiring the owner to take action to prevent further decline.

Establishing a local historic district and design standards for downtown Salisbury will not occur without effort and determination. First, the extent of the downtown commercial area will have to be determined. Historic features of the properties in the area will have to be inventoried to create the case for local designation. Next, the area's property owners will have to be consulted concerning what level and types of design controls they would like to see. Finally, specific standards will need to be established and officially adopted by the City for administration by the Historic Preservation Commission. Each of these steps requires careful planning and consensus building among the many property owners in the area.

The influence of such standards on investment decisions will be key. On one hand, such standards can have a positive effect in protecting investments in the downtown area from inappropriate intrusions and declines in property value. On the other hand, care must be taken to see that such standards do not become so onerous as to inhibit investment in the downtown area. Over the long run, however, there should be little doubt as to the importance of such standards to the future economic and cultural role of Salisbury in the regional landscape.



Policy D-10: Efforts to maximize the use of the public space of the sidewalk so as to enliven the downtown street space are generally supported. Such use shall be balanced against public safety and other issues as may affect pedestrian movement and other proper uses of the street right of way.

This policy is intended to maximize the visual and economic potential of the public sidewalk. From a visual standpoint, the policy is intended to create a two-dimensional look to the streetscape, allowing for the ebb and flow of activities and creating variety from one block to the next. From an economic standpoint, recent proposals have been brought forth which, under this policy, would allow for sidewalk dining and greater use of the public street space for sidewalk retail and other products and services.

Also included in the policy is a proviso that any such use of the sidewalk shall be evaluated with respect for pedestrian movement, public safety, and other proper use of the street right of way, such as access to utilities under and over the sidewalk area.

Implementation of this policy will require modification of the City code concerning sidewalk use and vending.

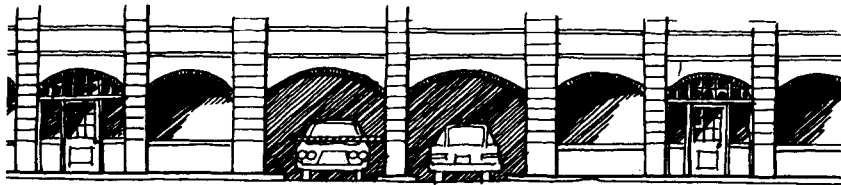
Policy D-11: The City of Salisbury shall actively participate, promote and partner in the development of additional parking facilities serving the downtown area. Such facilities shall be located and designed so as to complement and enhance the aesthetic and functional fabric of the downtown.

With the success and resurgence of downtown Salisbury as a place to work, shop, live, dine, and be entertained--both now and in the future -- comes increased demand for parking. In addition to parking demands generated by expanding office space and retail development, recent

interest in the development of downtown residential units has created demand for reliable off street parking and loading spaces. Further, should intercity rail service between Salisbury and other parts of the state and nation come to fruition, the need for additional parking in the vicinity of the Salisbury Depot and rail station could increase significantly. For all of these reasons, the City must be attentive to opportunities for creating additional off-street parking as circumstances arise.

There are several components of this policy. First, is the acknowledgment that the City of Salisbury cannot do it alone when it comes to providing for additional parking downtown. It will be necessary for the City to seek partnerships with the County, the State, and private entities to find suitable locations and funding mechanisms to create more parking.

Second, it will be critically important that any such parking facilities be designed so as to blend in well with the historic fabric of downtown Salisbury. This means, for example, that it may be preferable to have smaller parking areas on the interior of the block, rather than taking in an entire block or even a portion of a block which has major street frontage. Typically, when buildings are demolished to create additional off-street parking, this results in a dead zone both visually and economically for that streetscape. Also, it is often preferable to provide access to off-street parking at mid-block rather than on a street corner. This applies equally to both surface parking and parking located in a deck.



Regarding parking decks, in particular, many cities have had good success in recent years in creating an attractive street frontage and “mock” building facade along the streetscape side of new parking decks. Successful articulation of a “mock” building facade can be accomplished through the rhythm and spacing of openings into the parking deck, the use of traditional brick as opposed to monolithic concrete, and the addition of features such as awnings at the sidewalk level, planting boxes and climbing vines, and exterior lighting. Perhaps even more effective is the construction of retail space into the ground floor street frontage of the parking deck. At the very least, glass enclosures providing for window shopping opportunities can be created along the sidewalk frontage of the deck, regardless of whether there is a store behind them. As a sidebar, most of these types of architectural designs, details and suggestions could be implemented through the design guidelines of an historic district ordinance. (See Policy D-9.)

Policy D-12: The City shall encourage efforts to restore missing street fronts, particularly on corners where previous buildings have been demolished and replaced with (oftentimes) surface parking.

In downtown areas, when a building is destroyed it is often referred to as a “missing tooth”. This is because in downtowns, the majority of buildings do not stand alone, but are generally part of up a continuous wall of

buildings fronting on the street. The missing tooth analogy is appropriate, given the unsightliness of a missing tooth and its overall impact on appearances. Such impacts are especially dramatic when the location of the missing building(s) is at a street corner, where the absence of the building is noticeable from four directions.

Unlike suburban areas, where buildings have little relationship to the street, downtown areas depend upon buildings to help create the “room” of the street. It is the presence of a continuous wall of buildings that creates a sense of place, as well as pedestrian comfort and interest along the sidewalk. This policy therefore puts the City on record as supporting efforts to restore downtown area streetscapes through new building construction, particularly at intersections.

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